

# What do scientists really do?

Dr Jacqui Russell is a scientific adviser in the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology in Westminster, London. MPs, from the House of Commons, and Peers, from the House of Lords, are not usually scientists, but they still have to debate and vote on issues related to science. Jacqui works as part of a small team that helps MPs and Peers to understand the science behind the issues. She is most interested in biological sciences, health and education, but can be asked to find out about all sorts of things, from GM foods to chemical weapons.



"I was born in Australia, but my family moved back to England while I was a toddler and I went to school in Bromley, south-east London. At school I did GCSEs in English, maths, sciences, French, music and geography, followed by an AS level in Maths and A levels in Biology, Chemistry and Physics. My results were good enough to get a place at Nottingham University, where I studied for a degree in Biochemistry and Genetics.

I found it really difficult to decide what to do after my degree. As I'd really enjoyed my first degree I decided to go to Leicester University to do a PhD. My research project was to find out about one of the genes that plays an important role in our immune system. I found the science really interesting and I was very proud to get some of my work published in an international journal; but I decided that I didn't really enjoy working in a laboratory. You have to be very patient sometimes!

After my PhD I trained to be a teacher and taught science in Leicestershire for a couple of years. My favourite part of teaching turned out to be preparing lessons in the evenings, so I decided to look for a job that involved more sitting down and thinking, and less running around and doing. I ended up at the Department for Education and Skills working on Government policy for school science education.

That was a great job, but then I saw this one advertised, at the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. It takes me about an hour to commute from my flat in Hackney to Westminster, but I love walking past the House of Commons every day to work."

## Do you want to ask Jacqui a question?

You can email Jacqui during the Science Year *Can we; should we?* theme at the Science Year website. All the answers Jacqui sends out will be shown on the website at [www.scienceyear.com/chalkface/index.html](http://www.scienceyear.com/chalkface/index.html), so check there first to see if she's already answered your question. Her email address is at the bottom of that page. We'll feature some of the best questions on the ASE website [www.ase.org.uk](http://www.ase.org.uk)